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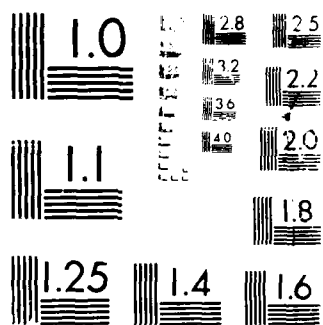
MOBILIZATION AND LIMITED WARFARE: THE REAL WORST CASE
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Director, MCDC
ATTN: IDEAS System Manager
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Ft. Lesley J. McNair
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Mobilization and Limited Warfare
The Real Worst Case?

by Lee Austin, MCDC

The term "mobilization" conjures visions of massive efforts to move the nation toward readiness for a major war. A momentous national decision is made and reserves are called, the draft resumed, gasoline rationed, civilian factories converted to military production, and the government takes control of communications, shipping and the like. That was mobilization as we knew it in the past and may describe a future mobilization. But it is neither the only nor, perhaps, the most likely type of mobilization that this nation must be prepared for in order to protect our national interests.

Much has changed since the US molded a system for mobilization based on the experiences of World War II. Prior to WW II, US public opinion and foreign policy was to remain aloof and let others police the world. By the end of WW II most Americans accepted the proposition that the US was obligated to play an active role in the maintenance of world order. We were a world power.

Other significant changes have affected our national security posture. Major items of military equipment have become extremely expensive and sophisticated, requiring long lead times for manufacture at a time when the shrinking globe has put a premium on rapid response. Competition from foreign goods and materials has weakened the US industrial base, while advanced intelligence capabilities and vastly increased Soviet sea power have put world wide sea lines of communications at risk. Congress has limited Presidential power to act independently during a period in history when conflict situations will likely require rapid Executive action rather than Congressional declarations of war.

The nature of likely conflict has changed radically in the last half century. Nuclear weapons make direct conflict between the US and USSR relatively unlikely; the recognition of world economic interdependence places greater significance on the affairs of third world nations; and, major powers try (but don't always succeed) to obtain political ends in lesser developed countries through surrogate political organizations and military forces rather than by direct military intervention. Local and regional conflicts are common. These factors combine to make our most likely future wars limited ones.

Is the US well postured to meet those national security challenges which require greater expenditure of resources than did Grenada and our peace keeping efforts in Lebanon but less than WW II? Do we have a system well suited to the accomplish-

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ment of our national objectives in places like the Far East, Central America, the Caribbean, Africa and South West Asia should the use of force be required to protect US interests in those and similar places?

Clearly, we must plan for the less likely but more threatening conflicts, but are those the only ones for which we are seriously preparing? Do laws now on the books help or hinder planning for the more likely contingencies? Do we have the right kinds of forces and do they have the best equipment for the types of combat in which they are most likely to be involved? Do we have adequate procedures for surging our industrial base and getting the most out of the industrial potential of our allies in situations short of full mobilization for major warfare?

Legislative Authorities

The body of law dealing with foreign assistance, use of military force, and war and emergencies is a mine field through which the Commander-in-Chief must probe in almost any given international conflict situation. Legislation developed in a piecemeal fashion over the last two centuries provides little in the way of a comprehensive set of laws dealing with national security. How do laws such as those limiting the numbers and lengths of time reservists can be called to active duty by the President and the War Powers Act effect the ability of a Commander-in-Chief to fulfill his national security responsibilities in today's world?

Forces and Doctrine

Are today's armed forces the right types in the right numbers with the proper equipment to allow the President to meet national security requirements at minimum risk both to mission accomplishment and the lives of our servicemen? Both the Army and the Air Force rely heavily on the reserves to provide the units, crews and individuals required to accomplish combat and support missions. They may be available, however, only in limited numbers and for short periods of time except in the event of the major conflict envisioned in the current definition of mobilization. Should the nation have expeditionary forces, composed exclusively of active component units and personnel, available for immediate deployment without the requirement to address reserve component issues during a situation calling for rapid response? Establishment of the Army's light infantry divisions is a significant step in this direction. They are organized and equipped to have the capability to rapidly deploy to Europe, the Far East and "...regions of the world which lack a

developed support infrastructure."¹ But are the light infantry divisions, as well as other combat forces, inordinately constrained by the active/reserve force mix? Three of the current five light infantry divisions rely on reserve component forces for at least part of their combat strength, reducing, for political if not readiness reasons, their ability to be rapidly deployed to hot spots around the globe.

Are the doctrine, training and organization of our armed forces appropriate to the conflicts in which we are most likely to become involved? And are the plans which flow from those three prerequisites to military power proper for the requirements of limited warfare? Robert Osgood points out in his book, Limited War Revisited, that our search for high performance weapons skews plans, acquisitions and capabilities by the process of technological innovation, creating a gap between theory and practice. The danger of the theory/practice disparity "...is that it encourages the commitment of U.S. power to support national interests in contingencies for which the forms of available power are inadequate or inappropriate."²

Industrial Surge

Since undeclared war begins barely above peace on the spectrum of conflict, increased industrial output is obtained -- at least initially -- using the normal methods and mechanisms of the peacetime acquisition process. Further, these peacetime, market-oriented mechanisms and practices are likely to be used as far up the spectrum of conflict as possible. Efficiency and political considerations argue against increased government intervention until absolutely necessary in the absence of a declared war. At some point, as the undeclared war rises through the spectrum of conflict, market mechanisms may begin to break down.

The President has considerable authority to surge the industrial base without declaring a national emergency or obtaining permission from Congress. The Federal government can establish priorities for defense production and take actions to expedite the contract process. It can allocate materials and facilities to industry, make and guarantee loans, provide advanced and subsidy payments to industry, prohibit or curtail the export of goods or technology, restrict production of non-essential products, suspend competitive procedures, install government equipment in private facilities and even take posses-

¹. US, Department of the Army, Chief of Staff White Paper, Light Infantry Divisions (16 April 1984), p. 1.

². Robert E. Osgood, Limited War Revisited (Boulder, Westview Press, 1979), p. 12.

sion of facilities which will not or can not meet national security demands -- all in the name of national security. The point at which the President exercises these authorities, if ever, depends on the political situation at the time. What procedures could be put in place that would make interventions such as these less necessary in the early stages of a conflict? Can procedures be developed which will make such actions more politically palatable when and if they are required?

A system to increase production in a deliberate manner, at specified rates, in such a way so as to produce the right material in the right combinations to support limited warfare is clearly needed. Such a system might include the development of strategies and capabilities required to protect US security interests around the world and the procedures for meeting the requirements inherent in each level of conflict.

Mobilization

One inhibitor to new thinking about these concerns might be the term "mobilization" itself. The baggage the term carries certainly doesn't enhance creative thought about the use of resources to accomplish national security objectives in today's world. Maybe it's time to coin a new term to describe the marshalling of resources at levels beyond industrial surge but below those required for a major war.

Regardless of the semantics, this aspect of national security deserves more attention. Given the constraints to planning for limited warfare, perhaps, for US war planners, mobilization for limited war is, indeed, the real worst case.

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